

**From media frame to social change?
A comparative analysis of same-sex rights in the United States and
New Zealand press**

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Abstract

On 26 April 2005, The Civil Union Bill officially granted registered same-sex couples in New Zealand recognition and relationship rights that are equal to that of traditional marriage. In a relatively short time, the country was successful in its pursuit for same-sex equality while the United States has continued to remain at an impasse. While there are cultural differences between the two countries, this research explores how newspapers in New Zealand and the United States represented same-sex rights during the last two years — a critical period of crisis for the gay and lesbian community in both countries.

In doing so, this research argues that media, and news in particular, are an authoritative version of reality that specializes in orchestrating everyday consciousness, particularly at times of crisis. At these critical moments the public depend upon media to provide information about issues in which they may not have direct experience. This research examined content variables within four news frames: conflict, human interest, morality and responsibility. The results revealed content in New Zealand newspapers that was more favourable to the legal equality of same-sex couples than in the American press. The paper concludes by questioning the impact this content may have had on social policy.

Proponents of equal rights for gay couples in New Zealand argued for civil unions, rather than gay marriage. This manifest use of the term “union” certainly may have played an important role in New Zealand’s success. However, this research examines more latent differences in media discourse, such as sources used, insertion of religious perspectives, integration of personal stories, a reliance on “horse-race” reporting, utilization of a civil rights frame, reference to legal precedent, and employment of terms such as “special rights” and “sin.” It is argued that any differences found in media representation could have contributed to the success of New Zealand passing this social policy and the failure of the United States to do the same. On 26 April 2005, The Civil Union Bill officially granted registered same-sex couples in New Zealand recognition and relationship rights that are equal to that of traditional marriage. In a relatively short time, the country was successful in its pursuit for same-sex equality while the United States continued to remain in an impasse on this issue. While there are certainly cultural differences between the two countries, this research explores how newspapers in New Zealand and the United States represented same-sex rights during the last two years — a critical period of crisis for the gay and lesbian community in both countries. This research argues that media, and news in particular, is an authoritative version of reality that specializes in orchestrating everyday consciousness, particularly at times of crisis. At these critical moments the public depend upon media to provide information about issues in which they may not have direct experience. Thus, the framing of these issues is of paramount importance in the process of social change.

Proponents of equal rights for gay couples in New Zealand argued for civil unions, rather than gay marriage. This manifest use of the term “union” certainly may have played an important role in New Zealand’s success. However, states in the United States, such as New Mexico, Montana, and Oregon have attempted to pass civil unions and have failed. This research examines the media coverage surrounding same-sex rights in both countries to search for more latent differences in media discourse, such as sources used, insertion of religious perspectives, integration of personal stories, a reliance on “horse-race” reporting, utilization of a civil rights frame, reference to legal precedent, and employment of terms such

as “special rights” and “sin.” It is argued that any differences found in media representation could have contributed to the success of New Zealand passing this social policy and the failure of the United States to do the same.

Same-sex Rights in the United States

Since the 1970’s organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign and the American Civil Liberties Union have been actively lobbying for the equal rights of same-sex couples in the United States. These organizations have met staunch opposition from organizations such as the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family – both organizations that are openly supported by the majority of Republicans in Congress and President George W. Bush. Presently, sixteen states have constitutional amendments explicitly barring the recognition of same-sex marriage and twenty-seven states have legal statutes defining marriage to two persons of the opposite-sex. A further small but growing number of states ban any legal recognition of same-sex unions.ⁱ

At the federal level, the Defense of Marriage Act was passed in 1996 by then President Bill Clinton, which defined marriage as a legal union between one man and one woman. This bill gave no federal recognition to same-sex marriages and allowed U.S. states to not recognize marriages performed in other U.S. states. In addition, President George W. Bush has recently argued for the passage of a Federal Marriage Amendment, which would explicitly ban marriages between those of the same-sex at the federal level. Throughout the long debate in the United States, there has been no movement to introduce legal civil unions for same-sex couples at the federal level.

As of February of 2006, Massachusetts is the only state in the United States to recognize same-sex marriage. However, even this may be soon be removed given that there is a 2008 ballot initiative planned in Massachusetts, which would ban same-sex marriage without establishing civil unions.ⁱⁱ A handful of other states – California, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey and Vermont provide some level of legal equality for same-sex couples through domestic partnerships, civil unions or a reciprocal

beneficiary law. Indeed, the exact form of equal rights for same-sex couples, when found, differs widely across the United States. Some civil unions, as the ones found in Vermont, provide exactly the same rights as marriage. According to the Secretary of State for Vermont, these rights include mutual financial support; complete access to laws concerning domestic relations; equal rights to laws regarding child custody and support; equal rights to property law and laws relating to decedents estates and probate; equal responsibilities to tort laws, tax laws and public assistance; access to spousal benefits; the right to make medical decisions for one another and to take family leave; protection against discrimination based upon marital status; laws relating to immunity from compelled testimony and the marital communication privilege; ownership and protections under 'family farm' designations; family landowner rights to fish and hunt; and abilities to apply for absentee ballots.ⁱⁱⁱ

Other civil unions that have been proposed, function as a form of domestic partnership with more limitations on rights than traditional marriage. Presently only Vermont and Connecticut provide civil unions in the United States. Domestic partnership rights are available in some areas to those who live together for a lengthy period of time but are not married. These partnerships are available in the District of Columbia, California, New Jersey, and Maine. Partnerships are formed through a contractual agreement and do not allow for all of the rights given under marriage but generally provide couples with rights to legal issues such as joint property. Reciprocal benefits, which are found in Hawaii, operate much the same as domestic partnerships in that they offer limited rights in comparison to marriage but often cover areas such as inheritance, property ownership and banking account access.^{iv}

The American public appears to be decidedly divided on this issue, with most voicing opposition to gay marriage, and slightly more advocating civil unions. A poll taken by the Pew Research Center/Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life between July 13-17 2005, found that 36 percent favoured gay marriage and 53 percent opposed it.^v Further, over half (53 percent) favoured civil unions while 40 percent opposed allowing civil unions. Other polls found similar results. For example, a CNN/USA Today Gallup poll done from April 29-May 1, 2005, discovered that 39 percent of the public believed homosexual marriage should be

recognized by the law, while 56 percent said that homosexual marriage should not be legal.^{vi} Finally, an ABC News/Washington Post poll taken from April 21 to 24, 2005, found that 27% of the public supported same-sex marriage, 29 percent supported civil unions and 40% supported no legal recognition.^{vii}

Same-sex rights in New Zealand

In 1986, the Homosexual Law Reform Act, which decriminalized homosexuality and legalized gay sex, was passed by Parliament, 49 votes to 44.^{viii} This act laid the groundwork for what would transpire eighteen years later. In December of 2004, New Zealand Parliament passed the Civil Unions Bill, which came into effect the following April. Rather than take the approach of Canada, Spain, Belgium the Netherlands, and South Africa by 2006, which all have legalized same-sex marriage, New Zealand appeared to frame equal rights for homosexual couples in the context of a secular civil union between homosexuals and heterosexuals rather than a traditional marriage. The Civil Union Bill established civil unions for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples. In February of 2005, the accompanying Relationships (Statutory References) Act was also passed. This bill removed all discrimination based on relationship status from all New Zealand laws and gave same-sex and opposite-sex couples the same rights and responsibilities as those in a heterosexual marriage. These companion bills also officially recognized same-sex marriages from Canada, South Africa, Spain and the Netherlands as civil unions in New Zealand. Interestingly, by February of 2006, only 62 heterosexual couples, 145 gay couples and 153 lesbian couples had a civil union in New Zealand since the bill was enacted in April 2005. This number is compared to the 15,683 marriages during that same time frame.^{ix}

Several groups voiced opposition to the bill (namely the evangelical Destiny Church and the Catholic Church in New Zealand). However, there was relatively strong public opinion in favour of the bill and key Christian groups lent their support. A block vote from Labour, the Greens and the Progressives ensured the bills passage. Three months after its enactment, a majority of New Zealanders said they were happy with the civil union law.^x

It is important to note that same-sex marriages are not allowed in New Zealand. The Marriage Act of 1955 continues to apply only to heterosexual couples. However, in 2005, United Future MP Gordon Copeland sponsored the Marriage (Gender Clarification) Bill, which sought to further clarify that marriage was strictly defined between one man and one woman. This bill was voted down in Parliament by a wide margin (47 in favour and 73 against).^{xi}

Framing Analysis

While there are certainly cultural differences between the two countries, this proposal explores how newspapers in New Zealand and the United States represented same-sex rights. In doing so, this research argues that media have a powerful role in shaping ideology about political issues. How same-sex rights are framed in the media could potentially have a profound impact on social policy. Research has shown that readers often forget specific elements of media stories, but retain general impressions^{xii} that later become integrated into their own perceptions of the world.^{xiii} News provides information that can play a fundamental structural role in decision-making^{xiv} about the surrounding world and shapes people's perceptions of that which they cannot experience directly.^{xv} News in particular is an authoritative version of reality^{xvi} that specializes in "orchestrating everyday consciousness—by virtue of their pervasiveness, their accessibility, their centralized symbolic capacity."⁶ Consequently, the public's only understanding of social issues derives from a construction provided by media over time.^{xvii}

This research aims to examine newspaper content through a framing analysis. News and information must be categorized if any meaningful comprehension and communication is to take place. News, like any other communication system, can be understood as a narrative that has implied meanings. Otherwise stated, "news and information has no intrinsic value unless embedded in a meaningful context which organizes and lends it coherence."^{xviii} The 'meaningful context' is the frame that shapes a news story.^{xix} However, the term "frame" has been problematized by a history of multiple uses,^{xx} and varying

conceptualisations ranging from schema or script to refer to audience perception and processing.^{xxi}

While sometimes difficult to ascertain on an initial reading, frames purport to view an issue through a macro lens by examining the central theme of an issue. Gitlin^{xxii} has defined frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse.”^{xxiii} Hertog and McLeod^{xxiv} state that “the frame used [for interpretation] determines what available information is relevant.”^{xxv} Thus, the frames of a story determine the relevant pieces of descriptive information that attaches to that concept. This construction of power and relevance is integral in understanding the frame’s significance and alludes to the assimilation of frames by the receiver.

In further integrating public opinion and causality into the explication of framing, Entman^{xxvi} wrote that frames increase the salience of particular aspects of a story by promoting a specific “problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” Further, a frame “suggests what the issue is.”^{xxvii} Perhaps synthesizing these conceptualisations into a single definition, Reese states that “frames are the organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.”^{xxviii} Thus, the frames of a story do influence how the public thinks of an issue through definitions of the issue itself, who is responsible and what should be done. This cognitive dimension of an issues’ attributes asks who or what is the cause of a problem, what is the prognosis, and what actions need to be taken.^{xxix} This analysis of media frames focuses on the relationship between “public policy issues in the news and the public perceptions of these issues.”^{xxx}

In examining media frames, content analyses are either inductive or deductive.^{xxxi} In line with the previous work of Gamson,^{xxxii} the inductive approach first begins with a loose, preconceived idea of media frames that may exist in content and then slowly proceed in an attempt to reveal additional frames utilized that may not have been considered. These studies can be difficult to replicate and are quite labour intensive.^{xxxiii} The second deductive

approach involves first defining the frames one wishes to search for in content and then proceeding with a comprehensive examination. While a drawback to this method is that one may not discover all the frames present, these studies can be easily replicated and can detect subtle differences between media.^{xxxiv} It is through the deductive method that this research examines the issue of same-sex legal rights in the American and New Zealand press.

Frames that have been commonly found in general political coverage are the conflict frame,^{xxxv} the responsibility frame,^{xxxvi} human-interest frame and morality frame.^{xxxvii} These frames account for a large majority of frames found in news.^{xxxviii} Neuman et. Al.^{xxxix} first argued that media emphasize on the conflict frame between individuals, groups, or institutions as a way of attracting audience attention. These authors found that the conflict frame was the most common frame found in political news. This finding was replicated in election campaign news^{xl} and has been found to induce public cynicism.^{xli}

Second only to the conflict frame, the human-interest frame can often be used to introduce emotion to an issue, event or problem.^{xlii} This attempt to emotionalise the news is often relied upon to capture audience interest.^{xliii} In another attempt to personalize or bring emotion to an event, news often adopts a morality frame. This puts the event, problem or issue in the in the context of religious doctrine or moral resolutions. Semetko and Valkenburg^{xliv} agree with Neuman et. al.^{xlv} that these references may not be direct. Because of professional journalistic norms, reporters may often introduce morality into content via an outside interest group that mentions these issues through quotation or reference.

Finally, the responsibility frame, first discussed by Iyengar,^{xlvi} argues that news implicitly assigns responsibility for the event, issue or problem at hand. This responsibility is often passed to either the individual, the government, business, the legal arena or civic change organizations.

The four frames of conflict, human-interest, morality and responsibility have been used to study other areas of news content but have not been applied to the issue of legal

rights for same-sex couples and certainly not through a comparative framing analysis across countries. Without making any causal claims as to the impact of these frames to public policy, this research takes the nascent step of examining what content exists in these two countries and how they compare to each other.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

This research principally aims to compare media in two different countries.

Therefore, the research questions are:

R1: Are the frames surrounding the legal rights for same-sex couples significantly different by nation of newspaper publication?

R2: If the newspapers are different between countries, in what way do they differ?

The second aim of this research is to examine specific media frames used in the content of United States and New Zealand newspapers. Given the success of New Zealand in granting legal equality to same-sex couples, and the lack of the United States to do the same, the following hypotheses were offered to test corresponding media content in each nation:

H1: United States newspapers will rely on the conflict frame (as evidenced by mention of politically-affiliated official sources, “winning”, and “contest” in content) more than New Zealand newspapers.

H2: United States newspapers will suggest that individuals are the responsible entity for “solving” the issue of legal equality for same-sex couples, via citizen voting referendums, more than New Zealand newspapers.

H3: United States newspapers will be less likely than New Zealand newspapers to utilize the human-interest frame (as evidenced by mentioning personal perspectives) in content.

H4: United States newspapers will be more likely than New Zealand newspapers to utilize the morality frame (as evidenced by “sin”, “special rights”, religion, legal rights, civil rights, discrimination, “marriage”, equating marriage to a legal union) in content.

Methodology

This research analysed news media content from 2003-2005 with the root-word “same-sex” in the headline or lead paragraph of an article. This time period was used as it includes the recent debate in the United States surrounding same-sex marriage in

Massachusetts and the Federal Marriage Amendment as well as the debate and passage of the Civil Union Bill in New Zealand.

A grouping of seventeen New Zealand newspapers, indexed by the Factiva database, was used for this comparative study. This grouping includes the major national paper, *The New Zealand Herald*, as well as smaller New Zealand papers such as the *Timaru Herald*, the *Waikato Times*, *The Dominion*, and the *Taranaki Daily News*. *The New Zealand Herald* is read by an average of 530,000 people on a typical day.^{xlvii} Given that just over four million people live in New Zealand,^{xlviii} The New Zealand Herald readership constitutes a substantial portion of the population.

In an attempt to obtain relatively comprehensive newspaper data from a country as large as the United States, a major newspaper from each of the three geographic regions (west coast, the Midwest and east coast) was chosen for the study as well as two other major newspapers that were selected due to their reach and ideological position. The aim was to select news content that had geographical and ideological diversity given the often politically divisive issue of legal rights for same-sex couples. This resulted in the inclusion of *The New York Times*, *The Seattle Times*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

The *Wall Street Journal* (daily circulation 1,800,607) was also included in an effort to analyse content from what is largely seen as a conservative newspaper, given that the publication primarily covers U.S. and international business and financial news and is owned by Dow Jones & Company.^{xlix} Conversely, the *New York Times* (daily circulation 1,132,000) has long fought off charges of its liberal bias, particularly on social issues.ⁱ Conservative critics cite the newspapers' inclusion of gay and lesbian couples in the 'Wedding Announcement' section and the continual barbs directed at social conservatives from A.O. Scott's film reviews.ⁱⁱ However, newspapers, unlike magazines, still often are free of ideological labels because of the "norm of objectivity" that is a guiding principle of news reporting. It should be noted that the purposeful inclusion of *The New York Times* was beneficial to give a fuller barometer of what all Americans were reading due to the powerful

influence that *The New York Times* has on other papers throughout the country. Similarly, *USA Today*, with a year-end circulation reach of over 2.25 million in 2003,^{lii} purports to relatively large section of the United States population.

The final two U.S. newspapers, *Chicago Sun-Times* and *The Seattle Times* were selected because they both stand as the leading newspapers in their geographic region outside of the east coast. *The Chicago Sun-Times* is the most profitable newsstand publication in Chicago, and *The Seattle Times* has a weekly circulation of more than 1.5 million, making it the region's most widely read daily newspaper.^{liii} Like all newspapers around the world, there are certainly charges of "liberal" and "conservative" bias levelled at these two newspapers as well. However, these charges have not been sustained over time or to such a degree that any purported ideological divisions can be used as a categorization for this study.

Coding Scheme

Two coders were asked to examine variables within the structure of the four frames detailed earlier: the conflict frame, the responsibility frame, human-interest frame and the morality frame. In examining the conflict frame, coders were asked to note whether the article presented "supportive" positions on legal rights for same-sex couples; presented "unsupportive" positions on legal rights for same-sex couples; presented both "supportive" and "unsupportive" positions on legal rights for same-sex couples; or presented neither "supportive" or "unsupportive" positions on legal rights for same-sex couples.

Within the conflict frame, articles were also coded according to their reliance on the "horse race" aspect of the issue. Meaning, if an article mentions which side is "winning" or mention the term "contest" in article content, this was coded. This coding scheme was developed to reveal if content had a focus on the contest of the issue rather than the issue itself.

All sources in an article were coded according to their political affiliation and official standing. Sources were coded as either "for" or "against" the legal rights for same-sex

couples. These variables were developed to reveal what type of sources newspapers depended upon to tell their stories and how these sources combined to form an ideological position, if any, on same-sex rights.

For the responsibility frame, coders noted whether the article discussed legal proceedings, governmental debates, individuals only or civil rights organizations. Coders were also asked two more questions to gauge the responsibility frame in content. The first was, “Did the article make any mention of a responsible agent for “solving” the issue of legal rights for same-sex couples?” If the answer to the first question was yes, coders were then asked who the primary responsible agent for “solving” the issue of legal rights for same-sex couples was. They were given the options of the courts, the government, individuals (through a public citizen’s vote referendum), or civil rights organizations.

In examining the human-interest frame, coders were asked to note examples from individuals who claim that legal equality for same-sex couples has had either a positive or negative personal effect on their lives. The valence of this impact was coded as “in support of same-sex rights” or “in opposition to same-sex rights”. These personal examples were an important category as they put a human face to what can be seen as an abstract social issue.

In examining the morality frame, coders searched for instances that both supported a moral prescriptive and a legal response. In doing so, coders were instructed to mark instances of noted discrimination, civil rights and legal rights in content. Conversely, they also coded mentions of “sin,” “special rights” or religion. This served as an important benchmark to discern if some newspapers presented the issue as one based in religion doctrine or civil rights.

Finally, a generalized “in support of same-sex rights”, “in opposition to same-sex rights”, “neutral”, or “both” newspaper article frame was coded by the research assistants. This coding category was important to examine over time and across newspapers.

Results

Through use of the Cohen's kappa measure of agreement, two coders generated a high 81.67 percent inter-coder reliability agreement for all variables coded in media content. An association was operationalized as a statistically significant relationship between the nation of newspaper publication and variables constructed to gauge the conflict, morality, human interest and responsibility frame. This test was necessary to determine if U.S. newspapers were more likely to portray same-sex rights negatively than New Zealand newspapers.

Significance was measured through chi square p values and strong adjusted residual scores, or the difference between expected and observed counts that demonstrates actual effects of this relationship. Strong effects of a particular case of one variable on a particular case of another variable were found if not more than 20% of the cells have expected values less than 5. Within these cells, adjusted residual scores that depart markedly from the model of independence (well above +2 or below -2) demonstrated added strength in relationships and suggested a directionality of the relationship.

Newspaper content was divided almost equally between nations (Figure 1). Due to the wide dispersion of content across all eighteen newspapers sampled, this research examined results based on nation of origin rather than individual newspapers.

Overall, 40.8 percent of total primary sources supported same-sex rights, while 31.4 percent did not and 18.1 percent were neutral. Secondary sources followed a similar pattern: 52.1 percent supported same-sex rights. This relative uniformity continued across all newspapers and the relationship between citing a primary source ($p = .110$) or a secondary source ($p = .113$) and the nation of publication was not found to be significant. Further, there was no significant relationship between the supportiveness of the source cited and the nation of publication ($p = .096$).

That being said, U.S. newspapers were far more likely to present the political affiliation of the primary source ($p = .001$) than New Zealand newspapers. When New Zealand papers did present a political affiliation, it was more likely to be liberal source than would be expected by chance alone (3.9). The political affiliation of the primary source

remained largely unknown in U.S. newspapers (47.7 percent), but when political affiliation was noted, it was more likely to be conservative (23.5 percent) than liberal (18.1 percent). American newspapers were much more likely to state the official standing of the primary source ($p = .000$). Lawyers and judges (3.4), government officials (3.1) and businesspeople (2.9) were presented as official sources for U.S. newspapers more than would be expected by chance alone, whereas New Zealand newspapers presented the official standing of sources far less than would be expected by chance.

The relationship between nation of publication and the use of the term “contest” ($p = .045$) and mentioning that one side of the debate appeared to be “winning” ($p = .009$) was found to be significant. When examining adjusted residuals, the United States mentioned “contest” (2.0) and “winning” (3.7) more than would be expected by chance alone while New Zealand mentioned “contest” (-2.0) and winning” (-3.7) less than would be expected. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, which stated that United States newspapers would rely on the conflict frame (as evidenced by mention of politically-affiliated official sources, “winning”, and “contest” in content) more than New Zealand newspapers, was supported.

The relationship between discussion of legal proceedings and the nation of publication was found to be significant ($p = .000$). When examining adjusted and expected residuals, it was found that New Zealand did not mention legal proceedings far more than would be expected by chance alone (-7.2), whereas U.S. newspapers discussed legal proceedings more than would be expected (7.2). The valence of legal proceedings and nation of publication was also found to be significant ($p = .008$). When legal proceedings were mentioned in U.S. newspapers they were far more likely to be supportive (5.7).

The relationship between discussion of governmental debates and the nation of publication was also found to be significant ($p = .003$) as well as the valence of governmental debates and nation of publication ($p = .013$). New Zealand was found to present governmental debates more than would be expected (3.4) and it was found that New Zealand presented governmental debates as neutral more than would be expected by

chance alone (3.6), whereas their U.S. counterparts presented a neutral governmental debate far less than would be expected (-3.6).

The relationship between discussion of civil rights organizations and the nation of publication was found to be significant ($p = .000$) but results revealed a high number of cells with an expected count less than 5, so the results could not be examined for this variable.

New Zealand newspapers were significantly ($p = .000$) less likely to present a “solution” to the legal rights of same-sex couples (-8.4) than U.S. newspapers (8.4). When explored further, U.S. newspapers were more likely to suggest that the government (5.7) and the individuals, through a public citizen’s vote referendum, (6.2) were the responsible agents for “solving” the legal rights of same-sex couples than would be expected by chance alone. Thus, Hypothesis 2, which stated that United States newspapers would suggest that individuals are the responsible entity for “solving” the issue of legal equality for same-sex couples more than New Zealand newspapers, was supported.

The relationship between nation of newspaper publication and the use of a human-interest frame was found to be significant ($p = .019$) with newspapers in New Zealand more likely (2.1) to show a personal perspective on the issue than U.S. newspapers. The valence of human-interest frames and nation of publication was also found to be significant ($p = .023$). When examining the valence of these human-interest perspectives, New Zealand was more likely to present the personal impact of legal rights in a neutral way (3.4) than their U.S. counterparts. Therefore, Hypothesis 3, which stated that United States newspapers will be less likely than New Zealand newspapers to utilize the human-interest frame in content, was supported.

There was no significant relationship between the mention of “sin” ($p = .859$), special rights ($p = .567$), or religion ($p = .999$) and nation of newspaper publication. Conversely, there was no significant relationship between legal rights ($p = .110$), civil rights ($p = .148$) and nation of newspaper publication. However, there was a significant relationship between the mention of discrimination and the nation of newspaper publication ($p = .010$). The

adjusted residuals revealed that U.S. newspapers did not mention discrimination (2.3) more than would be expected by chance alone.

The relationship between nation of newspaper publication and use of the term “marriage” in content was found to be significant ($p = .000$), with U.S. newspapers mentioning marriage more than would be expected by chance alone (3.5) and New Zealand newspapers mentioning marriage less than one would expect (-3.5). The Yates’ Correction for Continuity, used for 2 by 2 tables, resulted in a value of 11.410 and an associated significance level of .001. Conversely, the significant relationship between unions and nation of newspaper publication ($p = .000$) found that New Zealand papers mentioned unions more than one would expect (8.4) and U.S. newspapers less than would be expected (-8.4). The relationship between the equation of union to marriage and the nation of publication was found to be significant ($p = .000$). The Yates’ Correction for Continuity resulted in a value of 67.947 and an associated significance level of .000. New Zealand equated marriage and union more than would be expected (4.5). Taken together, Hypothesis 4, which stated United States newspapers would be more likely than New Zealand newspapers to utilize the morality frame (as evidenced by “sin”, “special rights”, religion, legal rights, civil rights, discrimination, “marriage”, equating marriage to a legal union) in content, was only partially supported.

Finally, the two research questions asked broadly if media content about the legal rights for same-sex couples differed and, if so, in what way. There certainly appeared to be a difference between the newspaper content of the two nations given that 3 out of the 4 relationships of significance tested here were supported. While all relationships did not appear to support the same position completely (i.e. all four hypotheses being found to be fully supported), all significant relationships found suggested that New Zealand treated the issue of same-sex legal rights more favourably than the United States press (Table 1).

In coding the content, the valence of same-sex legal rights was found to have a significant ($p = .016$) relationship with the nation of newspaper publication. Coders deemed that same-sex rights were presented neutrally in U.S. newspapers more than would be

expected (2.8), while same-sex rights were presented positively in New Zealand newspapers more than would be expected by chance alone (2.1). Thus, it appears there was indeed a difference between each nations' newspaper content and that difference appeared to suggest that the United States did not support the legal rights of same-sex couples to the degree of the New Zealand press.

Discussion

The findings here do not present a monolithic negative portrayal of same-sex legal rights in United States newspapers and a positive portrayal of -sex rights in New Zealand news publications. Rather, the findings present a mix of factors that still suggest a negative portrayal of the legal rights for same-sex couples in United States newspapers and a relatively positive portrayal of legal rights for same-sex couples in New Zealand.

New Zealand was found to cite liberal sources more than U.S. newspapers did. Given the conflation of opposition to the legal rights of same-sex couples and conservative parties in both countries, the increased reliance of New Zealand papers on liberal sources suggests that the issue of legal rights for same-sex couples was given more sympathy from the sources cited. Support for this notion comes from recent history whereby the conservative Republican Party led the proposal to introduce a federal ban on same-sex marriages in the United States and the conservative National party created the main oppositional force to the Civil Union Bill in New Zealand.

Newspapers in the United States also cited the official standing of their sources much more than New Zealand newspapers did. This confers authority to the source and therefore more importance to what is being said. If United States sources are not as liberal as New Zealand ones but are given more power as an elite and important source, this gives them far more credibility. In the case of the United States, it was lawyers, judges, government officials and businesspeople that were officially cited in newspaper content rather than social change activists, community services representatives, religious leaders, private citizens or scientific experts. Barring the scientific experts, one might wonder whether

these other possible sources of citation (and others not even listed here) might have been a more direct connection to the reader. This lack of personal connection to the reader matched with a more conservative, elite voice could translate to an oppositional position of power and importance against same-sex legal rights.

The use of United States newspapers to place these elite agents into a conflict frame of contest, where one side wins and the other side loses, further distracts the reader from the issue at hand. The conflict frame was not found to be as prevalent in New Zealand papers and, again, this could be seen as a contributory factor to New Zealanders feeling connected to the issue of same-sex rights where those in the United States continued to feel that it was not an issue that had a direct and immediate impact on their own life.

The responsibility frame also appeared to shift the focus away from a personal connection with readers regarding the issue of same-sex rights in the United States. For example, legal proceedings were discussed more in U.S. content, and were seen more positively than in the New Zealand press. New Zealand had a decidedly negative view of legal proceedings in news content, but a neutral one toward government debates, which were more common in New Zealand newspapers than U.S. publications. In doing so, New Zealand papers presented a neutral perspective on governmental debates while removing the issue from the legal arena. This measured response to the issue of same-sex rights may have tempered what can often become a volatile social issue in modern society.

New Zealand newspapers also didn't present a "solution" to the issue, while U.S. papers did – either through government action or a citizen vote. It could be argued that this need for an immediate solution, matched with a litany of legal proceedings discussed in U.S. content, could have obfuscated the issue to such a degree to cause a certain level of immediate anxiety on the part of the American reader.

This uncertain, and immediate, anxiety was met with a lack of human-interest in U.S. content while New Zealand papers were far more likely to present a neutral human-interest frame. This human-interest frame, in combination with a lack of conflict frames in New

Zealand content, may have created an important personal connection with the reader that did not exist in U.S. papers.

The morality frame was decidedly mixed. One would have thought that religious issues were to be found more in U.S. content, but this was not the case. Although, it is important to note that discrimination was found less in the U.S. press than one would expect. Thus, it appears that even though U.S. papers did discuss legal processes, it does not seem that these legalities were contextualized in the very real result of discrimination. This is a further omission that one could suggest would have engendered sympathy on the part of the American reader.

The final key to the differences between the two nations' newspaper content was in the reliance of U.S. newspapers to use the term "marriage" while the New Zealand press continued to use the term "union." New Zealand newspapers did equate marriage to union more than U.S. papers. The decision of New Zealand to term legal rights "civil unions" was noted in the very early paragraphs of this paper as a possible cause for the different outcomes between the nations. Although, as it is clear at this stage, many other variables measured here suggest that other aspects of newspaper content could have contributed to the starkly different results for same-sex couples in the two nations.

Indeed, it proved true that the general valence of same-sex legal rights in U.S. newspaper content was presented as neutral, while New Zealand presented the issue in a more positive light than would be expected by chance alone. If one were to follow the journalistic "norm of objectivity", the neutral response by United States' newspapers would appear to make sense. However, if one is viewing the issue of legal rights for same-sex couples as one of discrimination and inequality then presenting "both" sides of that issue is problematized. This adherence to objective reporting may be yet another contributory variable in the myriad of reasons that same-sex couples do not have the same legal rights as their heterosexual counterparts in the United States.

Clearly, media does not exist in a vacuum and this research does not suggest that social policy in each country was dictated by newspaper content. However, just as media

content does not exist in a vacuum, neither does social policy. It is argued here that social policy may have been influenced by media coverage. Through this detailed framing study, a cohesive picture emerged of newspaper content that constructed a personally-disconnected contest between official elites about marriage that had only legal ramifications without any resulting discrimination in the United States. Conversely, New Zealand content appeared to use unofficial liberal sources in relatively neutral debates that focused on issues other than traditional “horserace” reporting to present a personally connected human-interest story of civil unions that equated to marriage.

The findings here clearly need to be replicated within a larger sample base and with a more detailed framing scheme to discover more latent and nuanced differences between coverage in the two countries. Conducting in-depth interviews with reporters in both New Zealand and the United States would also help elucidate some of the deeper meanings behind content and the reasons for their existence. Further interviews and focus groups with readers in both nations would also help to examine a more causal agenda-setting link between coverage found and the social policy that resulted.

Figure 1

Content of Newspapers Sampled

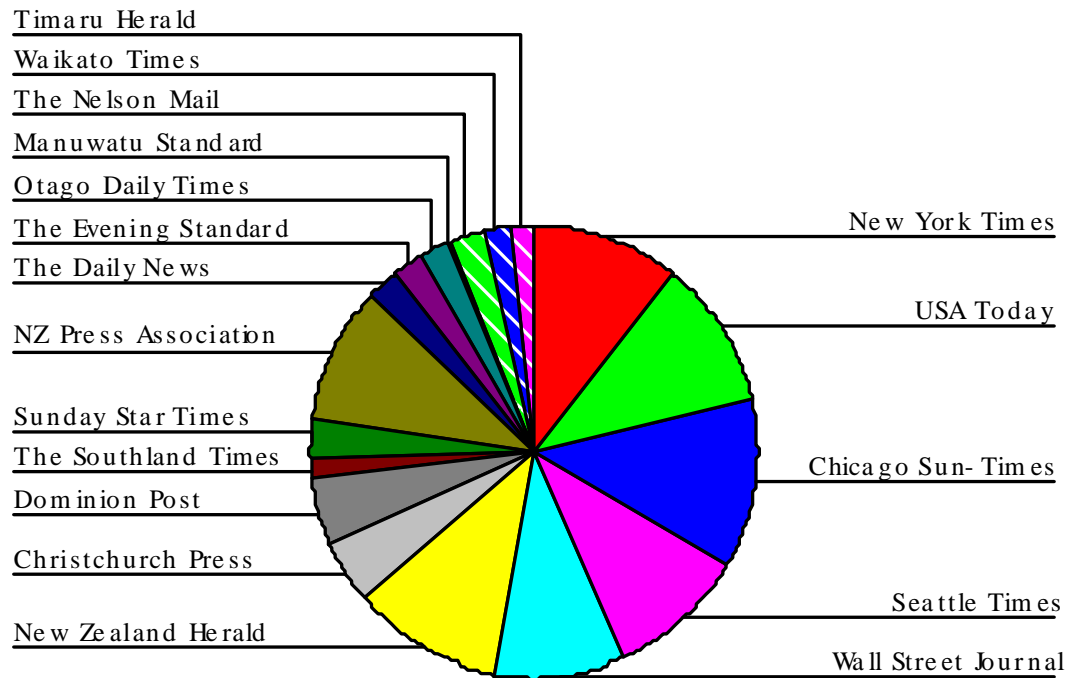


Table 1

Relationship with Nation of Newspaper Publication X...	Pearson Chi Square	Adjusted Residuals (Direction of relationship)
<i>Conflict Frame</i>		
Citing a Primary Source	.110	
Citing a Secondary Source	.113	
Supportiveness of Sources	.096	
Political Affiliation of Source	.001	NZ: Liberal Source
Official Standing of Source	.000	US: Lawyers/Judges US: Government officials US: Businesspeople
Term "contest"	.045	US: "Contest" use
One side in debate "winning"	.009	US: "Winning" use
<i>Responsibility Frame</i>		
Discussion of legal proceedings	.000	US: Legal proceedings
Valence of legal proceedings	.008	NZ: Negative legal process
Discussion of government debates	.003	NZ: Government debates
Valence of government debates	.013	NZ: Neutral gov't process
"Solution" to same-sex legal rights	.000	US: Government US: Individuals (citizen vote)
<i>Human Interest Frame</i>		
Human interest	.019	NZ: Human interest frame
Valence of human interest frame	.019	NZ: Neutral human valence
"Sin"	.859	
<i>Morality Frame</i>		
"Special rights"	.567	
Religion	.999	
Legal rights	.110	
Civil rights	.148	
Discrimination	.010	US: No mention of discrimination
"Marriage"	.000	US: more mention of marriage
"Unions"	.000	NZ: more mention of unions
Equation of marriage to union	.000	NZ: more mention of equation of marriage to union
Valence of same-sex legal rights		
Central frame	.016	US: same-sex legal rights neutral NZ: same-sex legal rights positive

Notes

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